

Africa Civil Society Organizations Position Statement on Beijing+30 Review



The African Women's
Development and
Communication Network


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We acknowledge that this work has been made possible by standing on the shoulders of countless fearless African feminist giants whose knowledge and wisdom continue to inspire us and keep the flame burning.

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We are determined to ensure the full enjoyment by women and girls of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and to take effective action against violations of these rights and freedoms.

- (Beijing Declaration, Paragraph 9)



BACKGROUND

As part of the Beijing+30 review process, the **African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET)** and **NGO CSW Africa**, in collaboration with **UN Women**, jointly organized a total of **13 Civils Society Organizations and Youth consultations** across Africa, engaging **3,136 participants** from all five subregions. These consultations brought together national, subregional, and regional representatives of women's rights organizations, girls' and young women-led groups, International Non-Governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, and other partners supporting the advancement of women's and girls' rights in Eastern, Central, Western, Northern, and Southern Africa.

This position statement from the consultative meetings provides an overview of the main issues pertaining to this year's theme: **review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**. It acknowledges progress, identifies significant gaps and puts forward recommendations from African Women and Girls.



PREAMBLE

We, over 300 African women, girls, and gender-diverse persons from 55 African member states representing women's rights and civil society organisations in all our diversities, drawn from across the 5 sub-regions of Africa and the diaspora, gathered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 30 to 31 October 2024 to review the progress and challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration Platform for Action (BDPfA).

Applauding the commitments governments have made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action¹ (BDPfA) in the last 30 years, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Agenda 2063 for the Africa We Want² in the last 10 years to guarantee gender equality, eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence, and achieve the full and meaningful realisation of women's human rights. We are alive to the interlinkages between the BDPfA, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Program of Action and its review, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063 commitments, valuable strategies for women, girls and gender-diverse people's empowerment and the realisation of their human rights and sustainable development. Noting the importance of meaningful engagements of CSOs, youths, and diverse persons in the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) process, we support the Pact for the Future recommendations to revitalise the Commission.

Recognising that since 1995 significant reforms and milestones have been achieved, especially in legal reforms where laws were enacted, leading to the institutionalisation of women's rights in various countries. The adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on Rights of Women in Africa, commonly known as the Maputo Protocol, in 2003 and its ratification by 44 countries reflects the goodwill and commitment by member states to the protection and promotion of the rights of all African women and girls.

Acknowledging that 2025 also marks a decade of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) with clear commitments for gender equality for all as a stand-alone goal 5 and mainstreamed across the other 16 SDGs. The Agenda 2063, whose aspirations for Africa's development are people-driven, rely on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and care for children—reiterating that all African member states have committed to these progressive agendas and are implementing the aspirations. We recognise Africa's commitment to prioritise and realise the African We Want, where ending poverty, advancing peace, addressing inequalities of income, and opportunities and access to basic necessities of life – water, sanitation, electricity and provision of social security and protection, as well as securing women's land rights becomes a reality.

Concerned that despite the progress made so far in legislative and policy reforms across Africa, the root causes of discrimination and violence against women and girls and power imbalances between women and men remain largely unchanged. In the majority of African countries, men and boys continue to enjoy patriarchal advantages at all levels of society, in the private or public spheres, resulting in the significant exclusion and discrimination of women and girls. Real shifts in power and equity are yet to be completely realised, and women and girls continue to bear the burden of sustaining societies in an unequal social structure.

Alarmed by the emergence of new forms of violations of women's rights not anticipated in the Beijing Platform commitments or present iteration of legal frameworks such as femicide, honour killings, technology facilitated exploitation, private sector-led exploitation intersecting with unaddressed

¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration>

² <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda>



systematic barriers to gender equality such as unpaid care work prevent women from fully living their lives both in the public and private sphere. There is a rollback and a backlash against women's rights, gender equality and inclusive governance systems across the African continent due to the growing fundamentalism and conservatism globally and regionally. Women and girls are increasingly blamed, and gender equality is maligned for the negative impacts of the current polycrises. The multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against women and girls in all their diversities, high rates of femicide, and multiple barriers to women and girls' effective participation in public life are still normalised and beset by inadequate political will for change by member states. The increased burden of unpaid care and domestic work, along with the massive loss of jobs for women in the informal sector and rising unemployment and underemployment rates among youth, including young women and women with disabilities, further deepens the crisis. The growing insecurity of women's land rights and limited control over natural resources for women and girls, alongside the shrinking spaces for civil society, rising violent extremism, and the reinforcement of patriarchal structures, is troubling.

Alarmed at the increasing incidences of violation of rights of women in sports. This includes alarming practices such as forced abortions, regulated menstruation, and monitored contraceptive use. These intrusive measures violate the bodily autonomy and reproductive rights of female athletes, often justified under the pretence of enhancing performance or adhering to strict training regimens. Forced abortions and the regulation of menstrual cycles can lead to severe physical and psychological consequences, undermining the health and well-being of the athletes. Monitoring contraceptive use infringes on personal privacy and can result in coercive control over reproductive choices. Addressing these issues is crucial to ensuring ethical treatment, safeguarding human rights, and promoting gender equality within the sports industry.

Concerned that Africa loses \$86.6 billion per year to illicit financial flows³ which denies developing countries the opportunity to generate the revenues required to meet their recurrent expenditure needs and fund long-term development plans. [Africa is home to 18 of the top 20 countries](#) with the highest rates of child marriage in the world. In West and Central Africa, 41% of women are married before they reach 18 years, and in Eastern and Southern Africa, 35% of women were married as children. An estimated 3,100 out of 4,000 HIV infections happen in Africa, according to the 2024 AIDS report, *The Urgency of Now: AIDS at a Crossroads*. More than one in four young people in Africa – around 72 million – are unemployed, in education or training (NEET). Two-thirds of them are young women. These worrisome statistics continue to leave Africa behind in its efforts to the realisation of the aspirations and commitments of the Africa We Want.

Sadly, 30 years later, Africa's dream and ideology of Pan-Africanism and Ubuntu remains unrealised and stagnant as Africa grapples with the high cost of neo-colonial barriers such as geopolitical boundaries, language divides, the triple crisis of climate change, high levels of illicit financial flows and extractivism, the debt burden, and overreliance on foreign aid for national and regional development initiatives. Concerned that we are still witnessing a significant rise of xenophobia, entrenchment of neoliberal economic ideologies, misogyny, and extremism which are frequently framed as nationalism, protectionism and economic growth, among the significant challenges that the continent is currently confronting.

Furthermore, the ruling elite's militarisation and concentration of political and economic authority, coupled with abuse of power and lack of transparency, election integrity and accountability, are evident. The negative consequences of geopolitics and neglect of women's rights in the migration crisis are significant drawbacks. The continuous undermining of African voices, the role of trade unions and human

³ https://www.un.org/osaa/sites/www.un.org/osaa/files/tackling_iffs_in_tax_reform_and_illegal_commercial_practices_-_nov_2022.pdf



rights defenders, and a decline in freedom of expression and association accompanies the shrinking civic space. These challenges are further exacerbated by the austerity measures that reduce investments in social services that are fundamental for women and girls' empowerment, which is further compounded by both armed and unarmed conflicts that result in increased violence against women, girls, children, and minority groups, including technology-facilitated violence and femicide. These urgent issues are further exacerbated by the recurrence of disasters and unpredictable extreme weather events, which are linked to the ongoing climate crisis that significantly impacts women and girls differently. Consequently, the need for immediate and transformative measures is underscored.

We therefore make the following **call of action** to all Member states, UN Agencies, African Union and other stakeholders:

Cluster 1: Inclusive Development, Shared Prosperity and Decent Work

To ensure inclusive development in Africa, it is crucial to include marginalised and structurally excluded persons in the development process, and establish effective mechanisms to hold multinational and national corporate sectors accountable to principles of transparency, business & human rights, and ecological justice⁴.

Unpaid Care and Domestic Work

Across African countries, the gender inequalities where women bear the burden of the primary caregiving responsibilities more than men are rooted in societal and cultural norms and systems within households, in public and in the workplace. This disproportionately affects women and girls negatively because in all African countries, women spend more time engaged in unpaid and domestic work compared to men⁵. This exacerbates women's time poverty, severely limiting their ability to participate in various political, social and economic activities. Women's economic empowerment goals are hindered by the continued gendered division of labour and the nature of unpaid care work. Women living in poverty in particular, are severely constrained in their ability to access economic opportunities, which is a key requirement for women's economic empowerment.

Call to Action

- Developing National Care and Domestic Work policies and laws that recognise, and redistribute care and support by reallocating resources, sufficient funding to initiatives on domestic and unpaid care work, and a more equitable sharing of responsibilities between the state, the households and the women will be attained.



⁴ <https://ngocsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Radhika-Balakrishnan-Inclusive-development-.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/data/interactive/2024/03/11/gender-divide-unpaid-care-and-domestic-work-across-afe-afw-africa>



Decent Work

As we mark 10 years of Agenda 2030, it is notable that African countries made commitments under SDG 8 to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. However, decent work deficits affect all domestic workers in regards to the working conditions of domestic workers, migrant workers and informal workers, the majority of whom are women.

Call to Action

- Develop national action plans for implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights⁶ which calls for member states to 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' human rights in the context of business operations. States must set clear expectations for companies by enacting effective policies, legislation, and regulations. States must further ensure that appropriate steps are in place to prevent, investigate, punish and redress adverse human rights impacts.
- Call for the ratification of the Protocol to the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community relating to Free Movement of Persons, right of residency and right of establishment.
- Improve the capacities of institutions linked to the labour market to address human rights violations, respect the rights of migrant workers and emerging discriminatory issues of labour migration.
- Increase migrant workers' participation in unions and associations to ensure their voice is heard in social dialogue processes.



The External Debt Crisis and Tax Measures

The impact of the economic/debt crisis on women and their overall socio-economic situation, particularly in the health, employment, and agriculture sectors, has proven to be devastating to the well-being of all women across Africa. The hidden burden on women is that they are more likely to be employed in low-paying jobs, have fewer savings, and possess less wealth compared to men. Many women and girls work in the informal sector where job security is negligible and incomes are unstable.

Call to Action

- Africa's member states need to improve the mobilisation of domestic resources and develop progressive taxation systems, ensuring that wealth distribution fosters social investment and inclusive growth.
- Moreover, executing debt cancellation strategies and demanding reparations would redirect essential resources towards social development efforts that advance gender equality for all, especially women and marginalised populations.
- Corporate accountability and the eradication of systemic corruption depend on the prevention of illicit financial flows and the execution of gender-responsive budgeting



High Level of Unemployment

Africa is in the unique position of being a relatively young continent with a rapidly growing youthful population. This brings with it much potential but also some challenges. African youth face pressing challenges in the transition from school to work. More than one in four young people in Africa, around 72 million, are not in employment, education or training (NEET). Gender disparity persists, two-thirds of them are young women⁷. Notably, wage employment, particularly in the formal public and private

⁶ <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/bizhumanrights/publications/guiding-principles-business-and-human-rights>

⁷ <https://ilostat.ilo.org/blog/african-youth-face-pressing-challenges-in-the-transition-from-school-to-work/>



sectors, is marred by significant restrictions on workers' rights and freedoms, including labor standards violations, unfair dismissals, reduced working hours and wages and breaches of occupational health and safety standards.

Call to Action

- Prioritise the enhancement of women's and girls' significant engagement and agency, especially in reducing the gender digital divide and gaps, to ensure fair access to technology and innovation.
- Enhancing women's economic empowerment and mitigating gender disparity in the labour market by formalising the informal sector through initiatives like a 50% procurement allocation for women across all tiers.
- Ratification and implementation of the ILO 190 Convention against Violence and Harassment will ensure safer and more dignified workplaces across the continent, ultimately affording women fundamental rights.



Women's Land Rights

Access to and control over productive resources are important determinants of women's economic empowerment. Despite the progress, women continue to face several barriers, including social norms and cultural practices that perpetuate gender discrimination in land access, control and ownership. This prevents women and their communities from realising their full potential and contributing to sustainable development.

Call to Action

- Ensure all African governments adopt, implement and resource the [Kilimanjaro Charter of Demand by African Rural Women \(2016\)](#).
- Combat gender-based violence against women land rights defenders, improving access to information for women living in remote and rural areas as well as addressing the disproportionate impacts of climate crisis on women and the exclusions based on identity, invisibility or ethnicity.
- African governments and land development agencies in Africa need to invest in community-led capacity enhancement in order to eliminate cultural practices that perpetuate patriarchy in land management and administration.
- Empower women and girls in Africa with adequate resources and capacities to lead and be at the centre of land decision-making, leveraging on the indigenous knowledge and lived experiences of women and girls in rural areas regarding land restoration, productivity, climate change adaptation, and mitigation methods.
- Adopt adequate land data on women's land rights that places at the centre ecological sustainability and women's leadership in land governance.
- The government must incorporate a measurement for land rights to ensure the data is gender disaggregated in all African national and economic censuses. It must also utilise existing data and collect new data specific to attacks against land rights defenders.



Cluster 2: Poverty Eradication, Social Protection and Social Services

To eliminate poverty, we must dismantle its gendered, institutionalised, systemic, and generational dimensions by advancing policies and practices that place women and marginalised groups at the centre of economic and social justice reforms.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent shocks from 2020 to 2022 have hampered global efforts to eradicate extreme poverty, and recovery has been uneven, with low-income countries lagging behind. By 2030, 590 million people may still live in extreme poverty if current trends persist. Without a substantial acceleration in poverty reduction, fewer than 3 in 10 countries are expected to halve national poverty by 2030. Despite increasing efforts and commitments to expand social protection programmes, significant coverage gaps left 1.4 billion children uncovered in 2023. Climate change is hindering poverty reduction, and disasters result in millions of households becoming poor or remaining trapped in poverty⁸. Further to that, the findings of the 2024 Africa Sustainable Development Report (ASDR) highlight the need for Africa to accelerate progress on SDGs 1, 2 and 17 and reverse the negative trend on climate action (Goal 13)⁹

Call to Action

- Adopting redistributive policies and increasing domestic finance for education, health and social protection.
- Removal of the barriers to completion, retention and transition for women and girls in schools, including pregnant girls, teenage mothers and persons with disabilities, and to provide comprehensive education inclusive of Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET), adult literacy, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) within and beyond schools, grounded in human rights, gender equality, and bodily integrity, evidence-based, accessible to all, responsive to children's and adolescent's evolving capacities, and enabling greater autonomy over decision making and lives.
- Guarantee access to available, acceptable, affordable quality, youth-friendly and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services that include contraceptives and safe and legal abortion without discrimination, especially towards women living with HIV, young women and girls with disabilities, sex workers, domestic workers, and migrant women, to reduce rates of maternal mortality.
- Increasing investments in social protection and social services accessible to all during their life cycles, regulating and/or reversing privatisation of social protection systems to ensure public services remain a public good, and refusing trade and investment agreements that restrict states from delivering social protection for all.
- Strengthening social protection schemes that promote, as appropriate, the economic, social and legal recognition of unpaid care and domestic work and allow such work to be valued within contributory schemes
- Invest in digital education for all demographics, ensuring inclusivity and implementing digital education programmes. In addition, policies should optimise digitalisation benefits, particularly for women and girls, and integrate gender-transformative pedagogy in education.
- Prioritise legal frameworks, legislative and policy reforms to guarantee re-integration and continued learning for all children, particularly for all girls and adolescents in and out of school, including those living in rural areas, on the move, and with disabilities
- Invest in school feeding programmes, school health and nutrition, and climate-adaptive strategies to increase retention rates of girls and young women, and build their nutrition and climate change resilience, supported by value-added agri-food chains.



⁸ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/2024-africa-sustainable-development-report>



Cluster 3: Freedom from Violence, Stigma and Stereotypes

To proactively prevent and end all forms of violence against women and girls by dismantling unequal power structures and fostering equitable, respectful relationships that prioritise the safety, autonomy, and dignity of all women and girls.

Call to Action

- Combat all manifestations of violence against women and girls by enhancing access to justice and comprehensive services via a multi-sectoral strategy that incorporates psychosocial and economic support for survivors while implementing a sustained human rights and justice framework that tackles the structural and systemic origins of all forms of violence.
- Create and establish a centralised database for gender-based violence statistics to serve as a developmental metric for nations (evidence-based).
- Address all forms of violence against young women and adolescent girls in all their diversities by improving access to justice and comprehensive services, through a multisectoral approach that includes psychosocial and economic support for survivors and adopt a sustained human rights and justice approach that addresses structural and systemic causes of all forms of violations.
- Protect women human rights defenders by creating a safe and enabling environment for the defence of human rights and prevention of violations and abuses, inter alia threats, harassment and violence.
- Implement national action plans aligned with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and other peace and security frameworks that safeguard women's rights in crisis and humanitarian contexts.
- Recognise the different and emerging forms of violence against women such as digitally facilitated violence and femicide, and develop stand-alone laws on these emerging violations.
- Establish community-based programmes that promote awareness, provide support for survivors, and challenge cultural norms that perpetuate violence. Gender-responsive policing and legal services must be prioritised to ensure women's safety.
- Adopt, ratify and domesticate the AU Convention on Violence against Women and Girls.¹⁰
- Establish progressive policies and laws that cater for the re-entry of girls who had teenage pregnancies. Ensure provision of social security safety nets for families and girls who had teenage pregnancies.



¹⁰ In February 2024, the Heads of State and Government reiterated their commitment to support and conclude the negotiations and submit a draft Convention for adoption in February 2025.



Cluster 4: Participation, Accountability and Gender-Responsive Institutions

Foster and promote an inclusive and supportive environment that prioritises special measures, electoral reforms, and systemic changes to ensure women's full, equal, and meaningful participation and representation in power and political decision-making.

Call to Action

- Guarantee and allocate public financing and resources for social protection systems and public social infrastructure, including sexual and reproductive services. Allocate gender-responsive and progressive budgets for gender equality, and health and education programmes more specifically.
- Eliminate all forms of electoral violence against women and girls and reduce all the barriers of women to realise elective positions.
- Invest in the collection of integrated data from the local to the national levels and develop awareness and accountability platforms that track the progress of state actors on global/regional/national gender equality commitments, promote information sharing, and promote open, inclusive, and accessible inter-ministerial collaboration and implementation.
- Remove and repeal laws that criminalise women and girls on the basis of sexual orientation, HIV status, gender identity and expression, sex work and other rights of bodily autonomy and integrity.



Cluster 5: Peaceful and Inclusive Societies

To promote sustainable peace by establishing inclusive societies, and eradicating structural and systemic inequalities and discrimination, the proliferation and entrenchment of armed and unarmed violent conflict, including in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon, to name a few, cultivating solidarity, and guaranteeing the meaningful involvement and representation of all women, girls, and other marginalised groups. This envisions and ensures a society in which every individual exists free from all forms of violence, injustice, and prejudice, with equitable access to resources and decision-making. The pathways to these societies is through the establishment of transparent, accountable, and inclusive institutions that promote respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Call to Action

- Integration of girl-child issues in all conflict prevention and peace processes
- Implement national action plans developed in line with UNSC Resolution 1325 and other instruments relating to peace and security that protect the rights of adolescent girls and young women in all their diversities in conflict and humanitarian settings and ensure their effective and meaningful participation and decision-making in matters relating to peace and security.
- Recognising the widespread and enduring conflicts across Africa, increase investment in peace education and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda; prioritise the maintenance of safe and accessible public services including inclusive and progressive family planning, pre-natal, intrapartum, post-partum and neonatal health during conflict and in peace times taking into account evolving capacities of adolescent girls and young women in all their diversities.
- Adopt National Action Plans, allocate specific budgets and endorse the AU Continental Result Framework on WPS towards effective implementation, monitoring, evaluation & reporting;
- Ensure the meaningful participation of girls and women in conflict prevention and peace-building processes at local, national, regional, and international forums for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and Agenda 2063.
- Address the proliferation and entrenchment of armed and unarmed violent conflict and invest in peace-building that is inclusive of the contribution and efforts of African women and girls in all their diversities.



Cluster 6: Environmental Conservation, Protection and Rehabilitation

To promote inclusive and gender-informed climate change actions and policies, women and girls must be central to the identification of climate change actions, be included in the design of climate policy and legislation, and be actively involved in interventions to respond to climate change.





Call to Action

- Mitigate and reverse the adverse impact of the extractivist, neoliberal development model on ecosystems and local/ grassroots communities, particularly on indigenous and rural-based women and girls.
- Invest in agriculture, especially food production, to a minimum of 10% of the national budget as per the 2003 Malabo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa and the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) to ensure women food producers have the resources they need to enhance their productivity and attaining food security;
- Increase investment in research, with an intersectional lens, on the social and gender dimensions of climate change and the action needed so that the evidence base and argument can be strengthened and incorporated into global policies, plans, and programmes. Climate-related sex-disaggregated data needs to be systematically collected and analysed.
- Invest in resilient health systems, with a focus on SRHR, providing opportunities to address persistent barriers to the realisation of the right to health, while addressing underlying causes of vulnerability to climate change.



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